



Jon Tester United States Senator for Montana

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Baucus, Tester: Public Health Emergency for Libby

Senators Call Announcement a "Monumental Victory"

Wednesday, June 17, 2009

(Washington D.C.) – After a nearly decade-long fight, Montana Senators Max Baucus and Jon Tester, joined by Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, today announced a long-awaited Public Health Emergency for Libby.

The Public Health Emergency determination requires the federal government to provide screenings and health care for Libby residents with asbestos-related disease. The Department of Health and Human Services is making available a short-term grant to provide needed asbestos-related medical care to Libby and Troy residents.

This is the first time in EPA's history that they have determined a public health emergency under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA)

"Today I fulfilled a promise I made many years ago to friends like Les Skramstad and to the entire community of Libby," Baucus said. "I am pleased that this Administration makes decisions based on sound science and rights the wrongs that have been done to the people of Libby."

"This is a long-overdue, common-sense decision that will go a long way for Libby and the thousands of folks who were poisoned there," Tester said. "This finding will help make quality health care more accessible, and it will finally cut the red tape that's been getting in the way."

Baucus and Tester are working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to organize short-term and long-term plans to fund and provide health care to the eligible affected residents of Libby.

"This is a tragic public health situation that has not received the recognition it deserves by the federal government for far too long. We're making a long-delayed commitment to the people of Libby and Troy. Based on a rigorous re-evaluation of the situation on the ground, we will continue to move aggressively on the cleanup efforts and protect the health of the people," said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "We're here to help create a long and prosperous future for this town."

She added, "Senator Max Baucus has been a tireless advocate for the people living in Libby and Troy who have confronted this public health tragedy for generations and we commend him for his work. We look forward to working with him and Senator Tester who has been working diligently since being elected to the Senate to bring much needed support to these communities."

"Senator Baucus and Senator Tester have powerfully brought the voices of the people of Libby and Troy to Washington so the nation could hear and understand what happened. They refused to give up on finding the best ways to help those who have suffered so much. Today's announcement reflects our Administration's concern for the residents of Lincoln County and our intention to act decisively to protect and improve their health and

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June 17, 2009

8:15 a.m.
Montana Constituents Coffee with Senator Baucus

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quality of life,' said Secretary Sebelius. "The Department of Health and Human Services has been working closely with the EPA and the residents of Lincoln County for a number of years to conduct screenings and help provide access to care. Now, we have come together with Senator Baucus and Senator Tester, Administrator Jackson, and agencies across HHS, to offer a new grant to provide short-term medical assistance for screening, diagnostic and treatment services in a comprehensive and coordinated manner in partnership with local officials on the ground in Lincoln County."

Last month, Baucus helped secure a \$6 million grant opportunity from the Department of Health and Human Services for the Lincoln County Health Department and a consortium of at least three health care entities to provide health care services to people battling asbestos-related illnesses.

The grant from HHS will fund the initial phase of the federal government's capacity building efforts on the ground in Lincoln County to meet its obligation as part of the emergency declaration.

Both Baucus and Tester have been strong advocates for Libby.

Baucus has been a long time champion of getting a public health emergency declared. In 2008, Baucus released a report detailing a 2002 attempt by the EPA to declare a Public Health Emergency, which was thwarted by the previous Administration's Office of Management and Budget.

Baucus lambasted the decision to not determine a Public Health Emergency at the time, calling it an "outrage."

Since news reports linked widespread deaths and illness to exposure to deadly asbestos fibers at the defunct W.R Grace and Co. mine, Baucus has visited Libby personally more than 20 times, secured millions for healthcare and cleanup, brought numerous White House cabinet secretaries to the town, helped save the CARD clinic in Libby, and has dogged the EPA under the previous Administration to keep cleanup efforts moving forward.

Baucus said this is a crowning moment in his decade-long fight to bring justice to folks in Libby "who were poisoned at the hands of Grace."

Tester made health care for residents of Libby a priority immediately after becoming a U.S. Senator in 2007. Since then he has worked closely with the CARD clinic and, with Baucus, secured significant funding for the facility.

Tester is now working on the influential Senate Appropriations Committee on strategies for even more cooperation and coordination across the federal government to clean up asbestos contamination and make the community safe.

Tester said creating a formal partnership would be a "giant step forward" for Libby.

Baucus is chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, which has jurisdiction over HHS, as well as a senior member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee which has jurisdiction over the EPA.

Tester is a member of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, which oversees funding for the EPA.

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